The Revolt of the Bourgeois, Or the Last and Great Strike

After Years of Oppression by the Proletariat, the Oppressed Middle Classes Rebel

Now, this is the story of the revolt of those middle classes which had long been ground as grist between the upper and the lower stones of the great socio-economic-industrial mill. It is M. Clément Vautel, the annualist of the famous Twenty-Minute Day, who tells the story in "Je Sais Tout," of Paris.

THE situation of the bourgeois had become intolerable. One must have lived at the beginning of the twentieth century to realize the exact conditions of existence imposed upon the middle classes.

One asks one's self to-day how these unfortunate middle classes could for so many years put up with such a painful lot—and one understands why the sheep became all at once enraged.

Toward 1925, he who said "bourgeois" said "pariah" . . .

The bourgeois paid all the taxes. For him there was no "eight-hour day"; he had to work like a convict in order to carry on his business. . . . While innumerable social laws protected the proletarian and slowly transformed him into a privileged citizen, an aristocrat, the bourgeois, unprotected, knew all the anxieties of the struggle for existence.

Property, dismantled by a thousand assaults, was, in the hands of the bourgeois, but a vague assignment, controlled by an ever more socialized state. Incomes were swallowed up by taxes resembling actual confiscations; inheritances were so heavily taxed that they had for the heirs a purely sentimental value.

The bourgeois, ground down, oppressed and, in addition, scoffed at, occupied the last place in that modern society that had been created by his ancestors. . . .

Let us, according to authentic documents, retrace the picture of a day of a bourgeois of Paris at the beginning of the twentieth century. We shall see how far human patience can be driven.

A Day's Chronology

Seven o'clock in the morning. The bourgeois awakens. He has had during five or six hours a feverish sleep; the overwork and the state of perpetual inquietude, in fact, prevented him from enjoying a truly invigorating rest.

He rings for his newspaper. Useless . . . The citizen valet last evening received from his syndicate the order not to begin work before 10 a. m.

The bourgeois himself goes to the stand to buy his paper, in which, however, he is certain to find only disagreeable news.

The bourgeois papers have for some time discontinued publication. . . . The "Egalitaire," the "Grand Soir," the "Sociate," the "Red Flag" announce only strikes, collective or individual resumptions, law projects dispossessing the so-called middle classes of all material property and liberty that might have been left them. In the local news he reads of some bourgeois arrested for vagrancy or begging.

9 a. m.—The letter carrier, authorized by his union to make one delivery a day, brings the mail.

Nothing but multicolored sheets from the tax collector.

Taxes, taxes, taxes!

9 a. m.—The bourgeois himself makes his coffee; he also makes it for his lady cook, hoping in doing so that the latter will be so moved as not to give him a notice of her quitting.

10 A. M.—The bourgeois leaves for his business. He intends to take a taxicab. . . . The chauffeurs receive him with a greeting like this:

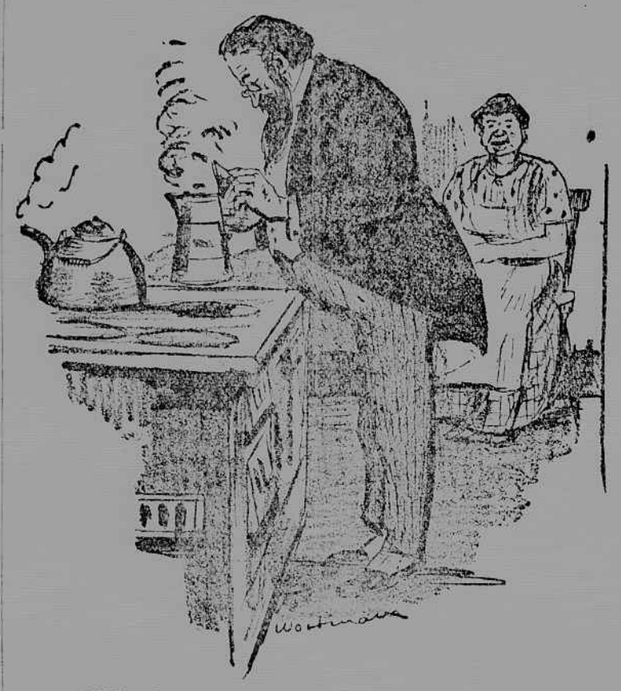
"The ride will cost you five [illegible] condition that you go to my quarter."

And always there is launched at him this insult:

"Get off, bourgeois!"

Bourgeois? The unfortunate, dropping his head, knows it only too well. . . .

11 A. M.—The bourgeois meets his fellows in misery. . . . Discouraging conversations. Manufacturers, merchants exchange lamentations—everywhere strikes, lawsuits, abuses of rights by the strongest. . . . How to struggle along?



"The bourgeois himself makes his coffee"

Noon—The bourgeois returns home for his breakfast. The lady cook has received from her syndicate the order to interrupt her work for two hours. . . . During this time the leg of mutton will be calcined!

The bourgeois takes refuge in a restaurant. He finds the portions smaller and the prices immensely high.

Thus the bourgeois is exploited, tyrannized the whole day long. . . . He has but one right—the right of paying without murmuring.

And in the evening, when going to bed, he sighs:

"How long, oh Lord? How long?"

Forerunner of Revolt

This word traditionally precedes uprising. In the first days of April, 1926, the Parisians were attracted by small blue bills posted on the walls which read:

. . . . . .
. GENERAL CONFEDERATION .
. OF BOURGEOIS .
. .
. BOURGEOIS! .
. If you want to put an end to .
. your grievances, .
. Combat Tyranny; .
. Free Yourselves; .
. UNITE .
. Apply personally or write to the .
. headquarters of the G. C. B., .
. Hangar-Aux-Laides Street. .
. .
. Read the Voice of the Bourgeois! .
. . . . . .

The "Voice of the Bourgeois," a small weekly, at the same time issued its first number. In it the syndicalized government was violently attacked by the General Confederation of Bourgeois.

Immediately, the "Grand Soir" and the "Red Flag," the organs of the new order, asked the government to suppress this "incendiary torch," evidently edited by the enemies of society. But, though hunted down, the publishers of the "Voice of the Bourgeois" continued to issue weekly, which was printed in a back yard in the quartier of the Monseau plain.

And the G. C. B. gained every day more numerous adherents.

About the 20th of April a large blue bill posted on the walls of Paris was worded as below:

. . . . . .
. GENERAL CONFEDERATION .
. OF BOURGEOIS .
. .
. BOURGEOIS! .
. The hour has come to break .
. your chains! .
. Enough of humiliation! .
. Enough of suffering! .
. Enough of ruins! .
. ALL ARISE FOR THE FINAL .
. STRUGGLE! .
. We no longer want to be ex- .
. ploited, skinned, oppressed and .
. scoffed at. .
. WE WANT JUSTICE! .
. In our epoch the most legiti- .
. mate demands remain useless if .
. not supported by force: there is .
. no victory without combat. .
. BOURGEOIS LET US RISE! .
. LONG LIVE THE GENERAL .
. STRIKE! .
. Upon the first signal given by .
. the leaders of the G. C. B.— .
. Physicians, no longer attend the .
. sick. .
. Magistrates, no longer judge. .
. Lawyers, no longer plead. .
. Travelers, no longer travel. .
. Financiers will cease financing. .
. Dentists cease pulling teeth. .
. Landlords cease renting. .
. Recorders and notaries cease .
. their functions. .
. Manufacturers cease manufac- .
. turing. .
. Furnishers cease furnishing. .
. All you who have the responsi- .
. bility of organization, of ad- .
. ministration, of direction, .
. cease organizing, administer- .
. ing and directing. .
. NO DEFLECTIONS, NO TREA- .
. SON! .
. Long live the General Strike of .
. the Bourgeois! .
. .
. The Executive Committee .
. of the G. C. B. .
. . . . . .

On April 27, the "Voice of the Bourgeois" and bills posted on all the walls of Paris announced that the strike of the middle classes would start on May 1.

Strike Is Declared

In the mean time the various bourgeois syndicates had carried on a great propaganda. . . . Everywhere meetings had been organized and demonstrations were made in the streets of the capital.

Lawyers, defiling in long robes, had been seen behind a blue flag carried by Mme. Henri Robert, the president of the corps of barristers. Placards brandished by eminent masters as well as young licentiates in law bore this inscription:

. . . . . .
. RIGHT AND OUR RIGHTS .
. A WELL-ARRANGED DEFENSE .
. STARTS BY ITSELF .
. . . . . .

The physicians, too, manifested—and this procession was in full array. One saw notaries in redingote and silk hat march by crying "Acts! Acts!" Landlords assembled at a large meeting and applauded the inflammatory speeches of the leaders who were not sparing of their terms; a procession of syndicated philosophers marched in the Place de la Concorde; and the Academicians, in uniform, the sword on the side, defiled on the Pont des Arts, unfolding a banner upon which was to be read:

. . . . . .
. WE HAVE STOPPED WORKING .
. ON THE DICTIONARY .
. . . . . .

It would be unfair not to mention the meeting of the conscientious and organized bourgeois who voted, seven against three, in favor of an order of the day thus framed:

"The syndicate of the Elegant Bourgeois, desirous to affirm their solidarity with the G. C. B., proclaims a general strike and pledges itself not to order any more new dresses."

The movement spread with extraordinary rapidity.

The hitherto timorous bourgeois joined with enthusiasm the G. C. B., and deserted their cabinets, their laboratories, their offices. . . . They wore in the buttonhole the cornflower—an artificial one, of course, in view of the season—as the badge of the revolution of the middle classes.

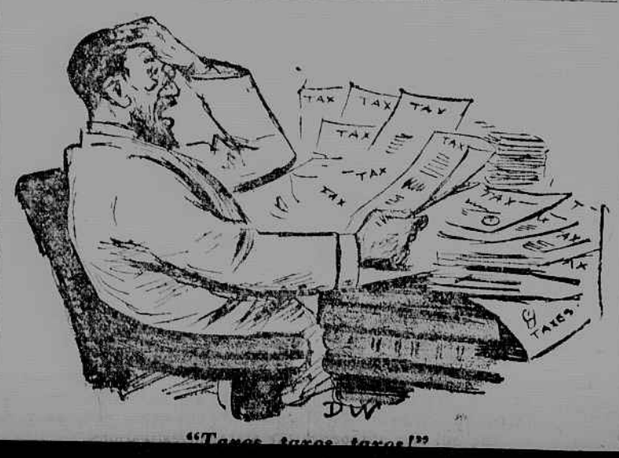
The "Reds" at first pretended to look down upon this strike of the "dirty bourgeois."

"They are molds," they said at the G. F. L., "and never were molds able to start a movement!"

The G. F. L. was mistaken. . . .

And soon the "Reds" found out that the organized idleness of these bourgeois, of these "useless," of these "parasites" had at least as alarming consequences as those of the proletarian strikes. Society had, perhaps, more need of engineers than hod carriers, more of physicians than of cap makers. . . .

This was perceived when the judges ceased to judge, setting free the crooks, the pickpockets and the assassins, and acquitting equally the robber and the robbed; who refused to hear husband and wife in divorce cases; when the lawyers, who no longer needed to wear their long robes, closed up their briefs and let the pleaders themselves clear up their suits; when the physicians no longer gave consultations, thus forsaking their patients, even the imaginary sick (many, by the way, recovered rapidly); when the engineers no longer regulated the movements of the trains, ceased to watch for the safety of the men and to control the functioning of engines that distributed energy, water, light; when the directors of theaters and concerts closed their halls (this strike was particularly efficacious); when the savants went fishing; when the architects refused all responsibility for the solidity of buildings; when the market superintendents no longer insured the provisioning of Paris; when the big stores closed, which, above all, dismayed the Parisians.



"Taxes, taxes, taxes!"

"Get off, bourgeois"

The dentists ceased applying to the most painful molars their cruel but beneficial little tools. . . . The most horrible toothache found them indifferent.

One of the militants of the C. G. T. came with an enormous aching of the teeth to the dentist, who answered him pitilessly:

"Don't complain; you suffer for your cause."

Ceased to Function

"Pray relieve me!" . . .

"And why should I? When you once cut off my electric current for two hours while I was about attending a patient and had to interrupt his treatment he suffered even more than you." . . .

On former occasions during the proletarian strikes society, however badly, was still able to function.

The strike of the middle classes stopped everything.

The C. G. T. had given the watchword.

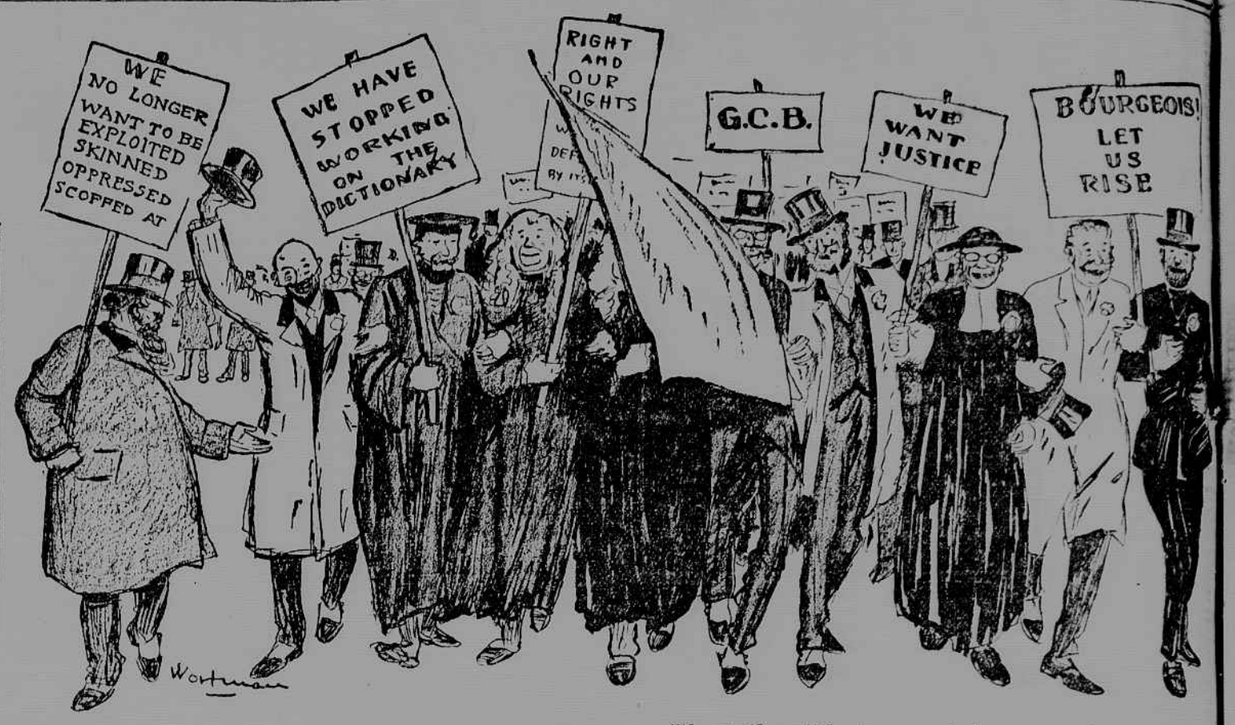
"Go on, in spite of them. . . . We can dispense with the bourgeois."

But the accidents on railroads, the falling-in of mines, sudden epidemics, all kind of catastrophes went to show that if manual labor is necessary, intelligent work is indispensable.

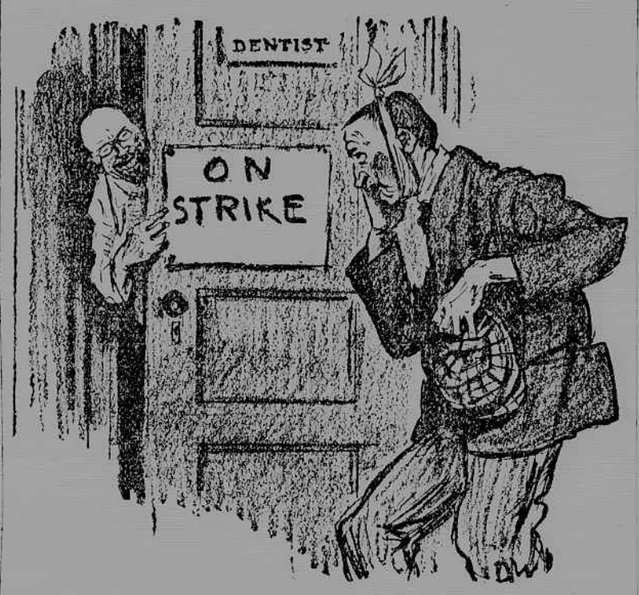
The bourgeois strike lasted only a fortnight.

The people themselves, deprived of the necessaries, not to speak of the superfluous, were ready for all concessions. The C. G. T. asked the G. C. B. to grant them an armistice. Until then the proletarians had kept apart from the bourgeois, each fighting the other. These two great forces now understood that they must keep in equilibrium; that is to say, to act in concert, collaborate, sign a treaty of public peace. And so it was done.

And ever since harmony reigns between the brothers who only too long had been enemies.



The strike of the bourgeois becomes a fact



"Pray, relieve me!"

An Epitaph

FRIENDS have asked me to write an epitaph on the Careless Employee.

The Careless Employee is always with us, hence this epitaph must be written while the subject still lives, still walks in freedom—while the don't-give-a-darn member of the organization is alive and yet is as dead as yesterday—as dead as the leaves on a painted canvas.

The Careless Employee has danced down the ages with his blindfolded eyes—has come up through centuries and is to-day a well developed product.

Goods marked incorrectly, telephone calls answered impolitely, bookkeepers making mistakes and elevator boys being careless!

In industry there are 26,000 limbs lost every year and this is six times the number of amputations among American soldiers during one year of the war. Somebody is certainly careless!

I would rather live in a henhouse and be compelled to claw and paw for a position on the roosting pole at night than have a careless employee in my organization and be compelled to continue his or her employment.

Mr. Manager, have you given thought to the idea of educating and encouraging employees to be more mindful, more thoughtful, less careless?

As managers we all know that we cannot knock, kick or cuff co-operators into line. But we can show them the way, and then, if they refuse to go the way, we can read them out of the way with this thought:

Carelessness is either disinterest of the heart or disqualification of the head.

Take your choice.

And now for the epitaph to pin on the wall:

The human that is careless is as impossible as mending a broken bell; as impractical as to attempt to satisfy a hungry lion with a club sandwich; as impotent as the dead past, and as inefficient as a safety razor at a negro ball.—Van Amburgh in *Price's Carpet and Rug News.*

The French Cafe as A Saloon Substitute

THE enactment of prohibition in the United States has made the task of finding a social equivalent for the saloon one of the problems of the day. In this connection the following article by Robert Dell, for years Paris correspondent of "The Manchester Guardian," published in a recent issue of that newspaper, is of interest. Mr. Dell explains the peculiarly French, or rather Continental, institution of the café, which must not by any means be confused with what Americans commonly understand by that name. As the article points out, the French, or Continental, café has nothing in common with the English public house or American saloon, but is the development of the old English coffee house, and, largely speaking, the Continental substitute for the present English club. Mr. Dell writes:

"Clubs are not popular in France and probably never will be. Nearly all Parisian clubs, even the most respectable, derive a great part of their income from the organization of gambling and are chiefly used by the members who gamble—the other members frequent them very little. I have friends in Paris who belong to two or three clubs and rarely enter any of them. So generally is it accepted that clubs exist principally for gambling that there is a tax of 40 per cent on club subscriptions, which makes it impossible for any club to exist without making money from the gaming tables, unless, indeed, it gets around the law. That can be done, and is done in a case that I know, by forming an association to which all members of the club are obliged to belong and making the association subscription several times larger than that of the club. In the case in point the subscription to the association is 100 francs a year and that to the club only 20 francs, so that the tax payable on each member is only eight francs a year, whereas if the club had a subscription of 120 francs it would be 48 francs.

"The chief reason, no doubt, why Frenchmen do not care for clubs is that the café in French life takes the place of the club for the great majority of men. The French bourgeoise who follow the strict bourgeois tradition are more exclusive than we are in their home life, in the sense that they open their doors less readily to persons outside their own family, which includes cousins to the seventh degree. This is not because they are inhospitable, but because the home in France is a sacred precinct which must be guarded against intruders. But, on the other hand, Frenchmen find clubs too exclusive and prefer the more democratic institution of the café.

"It is quite a mistake to suppose that Frenchmen as a rule spend a great deal of time in cafés. I know many Frenchmen who never enter them, and most men in France use a café no more, perhaps rather less than an Englishman uses his club. Naturally, bachelors go to cafés more than married men, and there is a small minority of men who almost live in cafés, but the habit is not generally approved. The typical French café is not the cosmopolitan institution of the grands boulevards in Paris, with its orchestra of red-coated 'Tziganes,' as they used to be called before the war. It is the café du quartier, the café of the Latin quarter or Montmartre, the specialized café. The ordinary café du quartier is frequented by the local bourgeois or local workmen—each has its own special class of customers. The French workman will not, as a rule, go to a café frequented by bourgeois, not in the least because he is afraid of them or regards them as superiors, but because of his intense class consciousness. But all over Paris there are cafés chiefly frequented by men belonging to various professions, or holding particular opinions, or coming from particular parts of the country. There are Republican cafés, Royalist cafés, Socialistic cafés, cafés for artists, journalists, poets, writers, actors; cafés for immigrants from Provence, Lorraine, French Flanders, Languedoc, and other French provinces, which are still the real—though not the legal—divisions of France. The result is that a young man coming to Paris from the provinces, a young painter or sculptor or journalist or what not, need never be isolated. He can always find a café where he will meet men from his own 'pays' or men of his own profession, and he can soon make friends in this way. He has no subscription to pay and needs no proposer and seconder; the door is always open, and he has only to walk in, if he has the price of a glass of beer in his pocket. It is true that he may eventually find himself metaphorically blackballed, but it will be his own fault; he will always be given a fair trial.

"I am disposed to think that the café is in part, at any rate, responsible for the greater solidarity that exists in Paris than in London between men of the same calling, especially in the liberal professions. The 'intellectuals' seem to me more isolated in London than they are in Paris, where they are all more or less in touch with one another. Perhaps this is partly because Paris is so much smaller and so much more compact than London, but I think that the café has something to do with it. Young men in France begin to meet in cafés when they are students, and they hold together afterward. The café, too, has the great advantage of bringing together the older and younger generations. A student of the university, an art student or a building writer has often the opportunity of meeting men already celebrated. There have been and still are cafés in Paris where a group of disciples gather round some famous man: Verlaine used to hold his court at one time in the Café François Premier, on the Boulevard St. Michel. Cafés have become famous in the history of French literature and art and politics, and have been associated with great movements. When has a great movement of any kind issued from a London club?

"Shall we ever have cafés in England? Sometimes I doubt it. . . . If we once had them in the form of coffee houses and allowed them to disappear. We can certainly never have them until we have altered our absurd licensing laws and abolished the publican's monopoly."